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THE GLADSTONE GOVERNMENT AND IRELAND.

“WE came into power pledged up to the eyes to do justice to Ireland.”

Such were the words addressed by a member of Mr. Gladstone's cabinet to a great meeting of his constituents at Birmingham. The endeavor to redeem this pledge has been the chief, if not the only, work of the British Government and the British Parliament during the past eighteen months. The efforts of Parliament have been worthily seconded by the unwavering support of the constituencies. Not only have the electors of England and Scotland consented to the postponement of all those pressing and important questions in whose solution they were most deeply interested, but they have continued to insist upon the performance of what they considered a paramount duty in the face of obstacles which might fairly have daunted their resolution.

England has long recognized that the unhappy history of the past had raised up between her and Ireland a wall of mistrust and dislike, for which she was in great measure responsible, and which could only be removed by patient persistence in well-doing. The people of England may perhaps claim that, in the face of the most formidable discouragements, they have so persisted with unshaken determination. It is hard for a powerful nation to concede even just demands, when it sees its statesmen insulted, its Parliament degraded, its laws broken, and its very existence threatened by those who make these demands. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, there probably has never been a time when the mass of Englishmen were so ready, nay, so anxious, to sympathize with and to adjust all that was reasonable, and all that was honest, in the claims of their Irish fellow-countrymen.

The history of the dealings of the Gladstone Government with Ireland is the history of the Irish Land Act of 1881. With

that act, therefore, with the circumstances which preceded it, and with the obstacles by which its accomplishment was retarded, we have now to deal. But whatever might be the ultimate form of their permanent measures, the Government, on their accession to office, found themselves compelled to deal with two questions, which, though of a temporary nature only, were of pressing and instant importance—the one of legal relief, the other of material succor—to the people of Ireland. To these measures, therefore, they at once turned their attention. On the 20th of May, 1880, the new Parliament was opened, and the Queen's speech contained the first indication of the new treatment which was to be applied to Irish troubles, and the first official announcement of the spirit in which the new departure was to be attempted. In it was the following passage:

“The Peace Preservation Act for Ireland expires upon the 1st of June. You will not be asked to renew it. My desire to avoid the evils of exceptional legislation in abridgment of liberty would not induce me to forego, in any degree, the performance of the first duty of every government in providing for the security of life and property. But while determined to fulfil this sacred obligation, I am persuaded that the loyalty and good sense of my Irish subjects will justify me in relying on the provisions of the ordinary law, firmly administered, for the maintenance of peace and order.”

By allowing this act to expire, the executive lost the right to punish districts in which outrages had been committed by levying upon them the amount of compensation claimed, and also the right of searching for and prohibiting the possession of arms within specially prescribed districts.

Mr. Forster, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, speaking in the House of Commons upon this subject, and appealing to the Irish members and to the Irish people to assist the Government in the matter, said that he and his colleagues believed that this, the first attempt for many years to govern Ireland without the aid of special legislation, would be effectual. It was the earnest desire of the Government to make use of the suspension of the act to enable the Irish people to show that they were as fit for just and equal law as Englishmen and Scotchmen.

Subsequent events proved that this anticipation was too sanguine; but to err on the side of generosity and confidence in the good feeling of the people is, perhaps, the most venial fault of which a popular administration can be guilty. The concession was attacked with some acrimony by the Conservatives. By the

extreme section of the Irish party it was received without comment and without gratitude.

As an experiment it was a failure, but it stands on record as a continual proof of the desire of the Government to extend to Ireland every liberty and every privilege which England possessed. On the same day that the announcement of the Government with regard to the Peace Preservation Act was made, a promise was given to introduce a sweeping and permanent measure of dealing with the whole question of land tenure, as soon as time for its consideration had been allowed, and the pressing exigencies of the case permitted. The question of Irish distress, arising from the failure of the potato crop, was engaging the attention of the liberal Government as it had that of their predecessors. To be occupied with a discussion of this nature was no new experience for the British Parliament. Relying exclusively upon the successful growth of their small patches of potatoes, the peasantry of the west of Ireland have long been liable to the recurrence of periods of scarcity, which, according as the failure was partial or complete, varied between extreme misery and downright starvation. Too poor to yield grain in quantities sufficient to secure the people against the uncertainty of their staple production, the rough lands throughout a great part of the western counties are incapable of supporting in all years any but the most scanty population. Such a failure as that alluded to had occurred in the summer of 1879, and in the districts mentioned the distress was wide-spread and acute. The Government of Lord Beaconsfield had taken steps to relieve it, and that of Mr. Gladstone now applied itself to the completion of the work. In accordance with the economic traditions which mark the conduct of English governments in dealing with local distress, private charity and the operation of the ordinary poor-law were at first relied upon to meet the difficulty, and the result to a great extent justified this policy. But the state was not content to leave the matter wholly to these agencies. Loans amounting to more than a million sterling were made to corporations and to individuals for the purpose of providing employment, or for the actual purchase of necessaries.

The justification of these combined efforts was their success; not a single person died of starvation. The suffering in some places was great, but the terrible scenes of the famine of 1846-7 were not repeated.

The danger of starvation was passed, but the districts which had been the chief sufferers were much impoverished. For the purpose of relief, the Government had divided off that portion of Ireland which, from its misfortunes, had become entitled to exceptional treatment, and the whole of the western counties had been included in the prescribed district. Where famine had laid its hand, there poverty was sure to follow, and it seemed not unreasonable to conclude that legislation for the relief of the latter should be co-extensive in its scope with the area affected by the former.

In the opinion of the Government the occasion for this special legislation had arrived, and they proposed to apply it on the principle suggested above. On the 18th of June the "Compensation for Disturbance Bill" was brought in, and its operation was to be confined to the districts scheduled for the relief of distress. To understand the nature of this next attempt on the part of the Government to carry out their programme of justice to Ireland, it is necessary for one moment to refer to the last great land measure passed for Ireland,—namely, the Irish Land Act of 1870. By that act, the power of a landlord to turn a tenant out of his holding was only allowed to be exercised subject to the payment by the landlord of a considerable sum by way of compensation to the tenant. In one case, however, the liability of the landlord was removed. Where the tenant was turned out of his holding on account of non-payment of rent, he was not entitled to claim any compensation under the act.

It was with this exception that the bill brought in by the Chief Secretary was intended to deal. The purport of it may be put briefly enough in the words of that minister, when supporting the second reading of the bill :

"Now, what," said Mr. Forster, "is this temporary proposal? Simply this—that if, in the distressed districts, and during this year of distress, it shall appear to the county court judge, the official to whom these questions are referred by the Land Act, that a tenant is unable to pay his rent; secondly, that he is unable to do so on account of the distress arising from the bad harvest of this and the two previous years; thirdly, that he is willing to continue in his tenancy on just and reasonable terms as to rent, and arrears of rent, and otherwise; and fourthly, if those terms are unreasonably refused by the landlord, then, and then only, can he obtain such compensation as the court may think fit, under section 3 of the act of 1870."

Such was the pith of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill, which was designed as a measure of temporary relief only, and

as a means of assisting those sufferers from the rigor of the seasons who were unable to hold out until the passing of the great remedial measure which was promised.

The bill was violently opposed in the House of Commons; a considerable number of the usual supporters of the Government either voted against it or took no part in the divisions. Nevertheless, after many days' animated controversy, the measure passed the third reading by a majority of sixty-seven. The House of Lords rejected it by an overwhelming vote—two hundred and eighty-two to fifty-one.

Whatever might have been the result of its passage, the rejection of the bill at once gave a further test to those who were engaged in promoting a course of agitation in Ireland, and alarming results soon began to make their appearance. Before, however, proceeding to describe the nature of the problem that presented itself to the Government, or alluding to the means by which its solution was attempted, a few words are necessary as to the general character of the agitation which was being conducted in Ireland under the auspices of the Irish Land League.

In England, as in every other country in which the popular will is the actual basis of government, agitation has been the predecessor of every important reform. To agitation has been conceded almost every important change upon which the Liberal party prides itself, and upon which the chief popular liberties of England depend. It is an undoubted fact, which must be recognized though it may be regretted, that the stimulus of strong popular pressure is often required to put in motion the machinery of reform. This is true of Ireland no less than of England. There is, however, this unhappy difference, that in the former country the necessary and legitimate expression of popular discontent has been often disfigured and discredited by the most lawless excesses and by the most deliberate crimes. It need hardly be said that the effect of these excesses and these crimes has been in every way disastrous. The amount of ill-feeling, demoralization, and distrust which they inevitably generate is absolutely without compensation or any corresponding benefit. The false teaching which has represented the many reforms of recent years as being the outcome of the lawlessness of the people is a twofold misfortune: it has discredited the almost irresistible power of constitutional agitation, and has represented as the motive power that which was but one of its most degrading and unnecessary adjuncts.

To understand the overwhelming necessity which compelled the Government to initiate, to insist upon, and to carry into law the third of the important measures with regard to Ireland which have occupied their attention during their tenure of office, it is necessary to bear in mind these considerations. In the beginning of the autumn of 1880, the Gladstone cabinet found itself in this position: Pressing questions of Irish distress had been met and dealt with. A strenuous effort had been made—unfortunately without success—to afford additional security for those who had suffered from that distress; and the Government had pledged themselves in the most solemn manner to bring in, at the earliest opportunity, a bill which should deal in the most sweeping way with the whole of the grievances which formed the basis of Irish discontent.

This was the moment that was chosen by the Land League for reviving with greater vigor than ever the agitation which they had commenced, and which, by means of their elaborate organization, they had succeeded in spreading throughout the greater part of Ireland. Beginning with the modest programme of securing to the tenant his holding at a fair rent, the movement soon practically became one which had for its watch-word the payment of no rent whatever, or, at best, a rent fixed by the caprice of an illegal, an irresponsible, and an interested tribunal.

All considerations of justice or injustice, of hardship or the reverse, in any particular case, were soon merged in the vague but convenient doctrine that the land of Ireland belonged to the people of Ireland—the people of Ireland for this purpose being represented by that limited number of persons who, under various forms of contract, had, for the time being, obtained a temporary interest in the soil. It is easy to see what must have been the effect of the wide-spread acceptance of such doctrines as these, enforced as they were by a body whose avowed intention it was to evade, wherever possible, the provisions of the law, provided only they could do so without incurring its penalties.

But, unjust and absurd as were the decrees which the Land League undertook to pronounce, it was the method of their enforcement that soon became the most pressing question with which the Government had to deal.

The unlimited right of free speech enjoyed by every British subject had been taken advantage of by the extreme party in Ireland to inflame the peasantry, and to excite at once their

cupidity and their passions. The chief feature in the campaign of the Land League was the prohibition which they issued, forbidding any tenant to take a farm from which another had been evicted. In the face of the almost universal desire of the Irish tenants to acquire or to extend their holdings, it was to be feared that this order might be disregarded ; means were found to insure obedience. It soon became evident that those who ventured to disobey the mandates of the League were marked men. Their property, their trade, in many cases their lives, were made the objects of attack. The ordinary headings of the police reports, with regard to what are termed "agrarian offenses," are a useful indication of the nature of the methods adopted—murder, manslaughter, firing on the police, assaults endangering life, assaults on bailiffs, incendiary fires, killing and mutilation of cattle, and firing into dwellings, are among the more serious offenses which this black category contains. In proportion to the extension of the Land League agitation, the returns under these heads became larger. Crime dogged the footsteps of the League agitators. In one small district twelve miles square, which had previously been almost undisturbed, a violent speech was followed by the commission of no less than eighty-seven outrages in three months. And this is merely one example among many. Wherever the Land League took root, there crime, and crime in its most brutal form, appeared, and the victims were in every instance those who had incurred the displeasure of the Land League.

It soon became plain that with the increase of crime there was no corresponding increase in the number of those whom the law succeeded in punishing for their offenses. Not only were witnesses intimidated, but jurors, either in real or simulated alarm, refused to perform their duties, or, being impaneled, even in the most serious cases did not scruple to violate their oaths.

It is hard to apportion blame in these matters, nor is it easy to decide how far the power of terrorism can really overcome the most ordinary notions of duty. That such a terrorism did exist, there can be no doubt whatever ; that its influence powerfully contributed to further the purposes of the Land League, is equally certain. As to the truth of this assertion, it may be well to quote the evidence of a journal printed in New York and widely circulated in Ireland, and which is, in fact, the most important organ of the League. The paragraph is headed "The

Ban of the Land League," and accurately describes the ordinary procedure of the body in whose name it speaks. It is to this effect:

"Some months ago the local Land League ordered a farmer and publican, named Berkery, to give up possession of his farm to a tenant who had been evicted *some years ago*. He refused to comply, though a written notice to quit was served upon him. The Rev. Father Sheehy and others were prosecuted, but the proceedings broke down in consequence of Berkery having been spirited away out of the country. Matters having changed to all appearance since, Berkery ventured to return, but the ban of the Land League was still upon him, and he is 'boycotted.' No one will deal with him, work for him, or speak to him, and his gates were broken down some nights ago, so that the cattle could not be kept in the fields. The other day he proceeded to chapel to hear the bishop, and was accompanied by two young men named Gorman. Observing the hostile demeanor of the people he left early, but the Gormans on leaving were pursued and stoned; they were knocked down and severely cut, and had to run three-quarters of a mile for their lives to Berkery's house, where they arrived covered with blood and bruises."

Such was the penalty inflicted upon those who dared to associate with one whose sole crime was an imaginary offense, and whose sole judges were the members of the local Land League. Such was the result of the persistent teachings of those who had undertaken to conduct a constitutional agitation in Ireland. It was against these results, and not against the treasured prerogatives of free speech and free assembly, that the legislation which the Government now found itself compelled to initiate was directed. The statistics of agrarian crime during the summer of 1880 showed some signs of increasing, but not to such a degree as to cause serious alarm, and a good harvest seemed to afford reasonable grounds for hoping that the autumn would see an actual improvement. But when the autumn came, the effects of the summer campaign became clearly evident. In September, the number of agrarian offenses specially reported by the constabulary was one hundred and sixty-six; in October it had reached two hundred and sixty-nine; in November it was five hundred and fifty-nine; and for December the returns showed a total of no less than eight hundred and sixty-four. Meanwhile, justice showed an increasing inability to overtake crime in the face of a wide-reaching combination to hinder its detection and to insure immunity to those who were made amenable. Nor did it seem probable that, so long as continued incitements to violence were offered to them by their leaders, the Irish people would

readily return to the paths of order. Mr. Boyton, the principal organizer of the Land League, was foremost in uttering inflammatory harangues;* and Brennan, the secretary of the League, suggested that the people should follow the example of the French peasants, who hung their landlords upon the nearest tree. In July, the New York journal advised the women of Ireland to throw vitriol upon the English soldiers; in November, it advocated the use of dynamite "as a political agent," and claimed the merit of its introduction for Ireland. Meanwhile, Mr. Parnell openly supported the paper which contained these counsels; the paid secretary of the Land League continued to sign his name as its special correspondent; and the League continued to depend almost entirely upon the contributions which it received from this tainted source.

In England, as these facts became more and more apparent, and as every morning the papers recorded a melancholy catalogue of unpunished offenses,—murders committed or attempted in broad daylight, houses entered in the dead of night and their inhabitants threatened, attacks upon unoffending persons whose only crime was their honesty, of the destruction of property and the mutilation of cattle; and when, during all this time, no single member of the Land League was heard to utter a protest worthy of the name against the infamies which were committed in its interest and as an apparent consequence of its teachings, the pressure upon the Government to come to the assistance of the ordinary law became strong and universal. For many weeks the Government of Mr. Gladstone, jealous in the cause of liberty, hesitated to give way to these solicitations.

At length, anxious to make use of every available legal weapon before resorting to extra-constitutional methods for the suppression of the growing anarchy, the Government instituted a prosecution in due form against the responsible promoters of the agitation.

On the 28th of December, Mr. Parnell, Mr. Dillon, and other prominent members of the Land League were put upon their trial for conspiring to prevent persons by illegal means from

*He was subsequently arrested under the Protection Act, one of the grounds of the arrest being the advice which he openly gave at a public meeting, in these words: "We have seen plenty of landlords and agents that deserved to be shot at any man's hands. I have always denounced the commission of outrages by night, but meet him in the broad daylight, and if you must blow out his brains, blow them out in the day-time."

performing their legal duties. The value of this appeal to the ordinary law was, it is true, somewhat discounted beforehand.

In the New York organ of the League, the jury who were about to be impaneled were coarsely threatened in case they dared to find a verdict adverse to the traversers, and the action of the Government in resorting to the existing law was as warmly condemned as their subsequent endeavors to obtain its modification. The trial lasted several weeks, and at its termination the jury, in face of a strong summing up by the judges, found themselves unable to agree upon a verdict. Ten were reported to be in favor of an acquittal, two in favor of a conviction. The traversers were accordingly discharged. The ordinary law had been tried, and had failed. Indeed, so obvious was it that this last effort in the cause of order was destined to produce no good result, that even before the close of the trials the Government had felt themselves compelled to announce their intention of applying to Parliament for exceptional powers for the protection of life and property. It is not easy to exaggerate the reluctance with which the most liberal government which England had ever seen surrendered to the necessities of the situation, and appealed to its followers for their support in narrowing the wide bounds within which the liberty of the English law permits every British subject to wander.

But the situation was one which admitted neither of half-measures nor of delay; to use the words of Mr. Gladstone, "the Government could not be parties, directly or indirectly, to the setting up of any law in Ireland, except the public law which had received the sanction of the state. That duty of securing both the maintenance of public order and the enforcement of private rights was paramount over every other duty. It was the first business of a government to see that these primary purposes are attained." Mr. Parnell had openly declared that the "unwritten law," of which he and his friends were alike the framers and the interpreters, was the law under which Ireland was to be governed. It seemed likely that his boast would be fulfilled. As things stood, life was not safe, and the chief liberty which the Irish people enjoyed was one which, as the Irish Solicitor-General truly said, "they had never yet claimed as one of the liberties of their country—the right to commit murder and to spread terror with impunity." Never for one moment was the chief and original intention of the Government to carry out their scheme of

Irish reforms lost sight of ; but circumstances for which they were certainly not responsible had imposed upon them the duty of postponing its introduction in favor of other and less congenial measures.

Various suggestions were made as to the best method of attaining the object in view. The suspension of trial by jury, and the substitution of trial by a judge, or by a specially appointed commission, were among the number. But both these remedies ignored the true difficulties of the situation. Judge or commissioner must base their decisions upon formal legal evidence, and upon that alone, and it was precisely this evidence that it was impossible to obtain. Sympathy with the accused, or fear of the consequences which might ensue from being a party to a conviction, were sufficient to render illusory any proceedings which depended upon the testimony of even eye-witnesses. It was these considerations that contributed to the ultimate preference being given to the methods contained in the Protection of Person and Property Bill, which was introduced into the House of Commons by the Chief Secretary, on the 24th of January. The bill was a short one. Its effect was briefly as follows :

The Lord Lieutenant was empowered to arrest and detain in prison any person who was reasonably suspected of having been guilty, either as principal or accessory, of high treason, treason-felony, or treasonable practices in any part of Ireland ; or of any crime punishable by law, committed within a prescribed district, being an act of violence or intimidation tending to disturb law and order. The duration of the act was to be limited to eighteen months.

The bill was opposed, as was natural, with the greatest vehemence by the extreme Irish party. The returns of crime upon which the case of the Government was based were attacked. But the figures remained practically unshaken. Here and there individual cases were criticised, but no denial of the main proposition, that was supported by no less than two thousand five hundred and eighty-five cases of agrarian crime, was even attempted. Great stress was laid upon the fact that a large proportion of the cases, amounting to nearly one-half, consisted of threatening letters ; but in a country where, though a threat is not always followed by a crime, a crime is almost invariably preceded by a threat, these contributions to the general system of terrorism could not be lightly regarded, much less overlooked.

Having failed to justify, the followers of Mr. Parnell sought to enforce their opposition by a recourse to the senseless and contemptible methods of obstruction. This new parliamentary weapon consisted in making use of every rule which the ordinances of the House provided for the orderly and efficient conduct of its debates, to hinder and, if possible, render impracticable any legislation whatever. The rules of the House had been framed for those who were anxious to observe them in the spirit as well as in the letter; and the new method at first succeeded in enabling those who practiced it to waste an enormous amount of invaluable time. More than this, however, it was unable to effect. An undisguised attempt to bring its deliberations into contempt, and to insure their miscarriage, is plainly the most certain means of stimulating the resolution and confirming the purpose of any self-respecting assembly. The British House of Commons was no exception to this rule. Mr. Bright well expressed the general opinion when he thus alluded to a particularly flagrant instance of the abuse: "I am perfectly certain," said he, "that the time must come—I hope it will come—when the Irish people, all that is thoughtful and all that is sensible amongst them, will find out that the way to do good to Ireland is not to degrade this House of the Imperial Parliament. Further, I am greatly mistaken if it be not the fact that this Imperial Parliament will know how to defend itself from the grossest case of insult and obstruction which, in my opinion, has ever been exhibited here."

On two occasions the House was compelled to sit for periods of forty-two and twenty-one hours respectively, and forced during that time to listen to the wearisome iteration of what was neither argument nor eloquence. From the outset only one issue was possible. The bill was carried by an immense majority, but neither had the reputation of the extreme Irish party been improved, nor had the good relations which they sought to establish with the radical party in England been extended.

The effect of the passage of the Protection Act was at once apparent. Indeed, the announcement that it was to be introduced was, in itself, effectual in checking the course of crime. From four hundred and thirty-nine in January, the number of outrages sank to one hundred and seventy in February, and one hundred and forty-six in March. In April, the leniency with which those apprehended were treated, and the continued incitements to violence which were placed before the people by their

leaders, gave a fresh impetus to the offenders, and the number of crimes increased, till in May they had reached the formidable total of three hundred and thirty-nine, or nearly half what they had been during the month of December, before the passing of the act.

From that time to the present, the returns have shown a decrease. One feature is especially noticeable—namely, the almost total suppression of open resistance to the law. Many who knew the Irish people best were of opinion that a collision between the authorities engaged in the execution of the law and the crowds who sought to hinder them was sooner or later inevitable, and that such a collision could end only in bloodshed. Happily, however, those responsible for the enforcement of the law were careful to protect the officers of the law by a force which made resistance improbable, because it made it hopeless.*

Such is the history of the Protection Act. Forced upon a reluctant Government, which had taken office with the openly declared intention of dispensing with any such adventitious aids to administration, it was adopted by them only when the sternest necessity had made it impossible any longer to resist the demand for its application, and when to have refused it would have been criminal. Upon their power to dispense with such assistance the Government had prided themselves; by its introduction and enforcement it was impossible that they could be anything but losers; and to suggest that a cabinet of which Mr. Gladstone was the chief, and of which Mr. Bright was a member, could have supported any curtailment of liberty which was not in the interest of liberty itself, is a proposition manifestly absurd to those who have any knowledge of English politics and English statesmen. It is a relief to turn to the consideration of the new epoch which commenced with the introduction of what is now the Land Act of 1881. This was the measure of justice to Ireland upon the realization of which, through good report and evil, Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues had without wavering kept their attention fixed.

* One fact sheds considerable light upon the nature of Irish crime. In no single case was the life of a man attempted who had been placed under the personal protection of the police. In more than one instance, the moment that protection was removed, murder or attempted murder followed. The possibility of danger to the assassin was invariably a sufficient safeguard. Personal protection was freely given by the authorities, and much loss of life was doubtless avoided thereby.

Difficulties not of their own making, still less of their own seeking, had arisen to interfere with its accomplishment. Now, however, the great task which had been so long deferred was to be taken in hand—was to be framed and conducted with all the power of Mr. Gladstone's marvelous intellect and unrivaled energy. It was to be supported by a Government no less anxious than their chief for its success, and it was to be indorsed by the willing majorities of all that was best of English and Irish Liberalism. A law which is in effect a new agrarian code must necessarily be as lengthy and complex as the conditions with which it has to deal are involved. To attempt any detailed description of the Irish Land Act within the limits of this paper would be tedious, if not impossible. But a slight sketch of the wants which it was to supply, and of the means by which it sought to supply them, cannot be omitted.

The difficulties with which the Irish tenant had to contend were of a twofold nature. They were due partly to defects in the existing law, but still more to a combination of causes which made the operation of that law peculiarly harsh and uncongenial in the actual circumstances of the case.

The cultivation of the soil having become practically the sole industry of a large portion of Ireland, the magnitude of the demand for land, and the inevitable limitation of the supply, had combined to raise the price which the owners of that commodity were able to charge for its use to a figure which left but little profit to the cultivator. In addition to the difficulty thus created, much discontent had arisen from the fact that the landlord, by evicting a tenant from his holding, could at any time render illusory the efforts of the tenant to create for himself a valuable and permanent property in the land he tilled.

Some check had been put upon the power of capricious eviction by the Land Act of 1870, and in many cases the landlord was only able to avail himself of his rights on payment of a penalty by way of compensation to the tenant. Experience, however, had shown that the safeguards which had been provided were not sufficient to secure the ends they were intended to serve. The action of a few unwise or impoverished landlords in the exercise of their legal rights had created a feeling of insecurity among many who were practically safe from similar interference. The loss by a single tenant of much of the labor which, during a lengthened occupation of his holding, he had

expended, and the knowledge that this loss was incurred without hope of legal redress, deterred many persons from investing in the soil that capital which alone could make it productive.

Some discontent arose, also, from the fact that, though custom had conferred upon the tenant from year to year a salable interest in his tenancy, and although purchasers were not unfrequently found ready to pay large sums for what may be called the good-will of the business, the right of sale as between tenant and purchaser was not generally recognized by the law, except in the province of Ulster.

Lastly, and above all, the hardship which the fictitious value of land enabled its possessors to inflict upon those who were solely dependent upon it for their livelihood was most keenly felt, and the cry for a "Fair Rent" received an additional significance when accompanied by deficient harvests and the increase of American competition. Fixity of Tenure, Free Sale, and Fair Rents—the "Three F's," as they have been popularly called—were the watch-words of the land reformers in Ireland. Fixity of tenure, free sale, and fair rents are practically the benefits which have been secured to the Irish tenants by the Land Act of 1881. Perhaps the most startling feature of the act is the institution of a special court, to which has been confided an almost unlimited power of hearing and adjudicating upon all questions connected with the tenure of land in Ireland. By the court a fair rent as between landlord and tenant is to be assessed; to the court the tenant can appeal to transform his limited interest into a fixed term of fifteen years, and his position is guaranteed to him, subject only to certain elementary conditions, and as to the breach of those conditions the court is to decide. At the completion of the first term, a renewal for a similar period under the same conditions may be secured. The right of free sale has been almost unconditionally conferred. Such are the main provisions of the measure; others, scarcely less important, are comprised within it. Facilities have been offered whereby a tenant is enabled to become the absolute owner of his holding; money on the most liberal terms has been put at the disposal of those who are anxious to improve their properties; and, lastly, assistance has been offered to those who, unable to contend with the poverty of the soil and the inclemency of the seasons, wish to exchange their meager prospects for a brighter future in the British colonies or in the United States.

The Land Bill was brought in by Mr. Gladstone on April 7th. On May 2d it passed the second reading. Several weeks were occupied by the discussions in committee. Little aid, and not a little difficulty, was afforded to the Government by those in whose interest the bill was framed. It is satisfactory to note, however, that by those Irishmen who regarded the welfare of their own country as even more important than the infliction of injury upon Great Britain, it was warmly supported. Men who, at the risk of their liberties and of their fortunes, had in past days shown their devotion to Ireland; others who, by the constant and successful exercise of their great abilities on her behalf, had certainly merited the confidence and esteem of their countrymen, hailed it as an earnest and substantial attempt to cope with the difficulties of the situation. From Mr. Parnell and his small band of close adherents no such support was forthcoming. As before the introduction of the bill they had depreciated the remedies it offered, and had challenged the sincerity of the Government; as during its progress they had relaxed none of their efforts to damage its reception; so, after its final inscription upon the statute-book, have they strained every nerve to insure its failure and to discredit its operation with the people of Ireland.

Fortunately, however, signs are not wanting that the "message of peace" sent by England to Ireland may achieve its purpose, despite the efforts of those whose interest it is that there shall be no peace.

If the tone which has been adopted by one who has been both active and consistent in opposing the policy of the Government, and who has figured as an ardent supporter of the claims of the tenant farmers, finds an echo in many parts of Ireland, much good may be hoped for.

Dr. Croke, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel, concluded a recent address with the expression of this hope—"that, as the bill had been offered in a generous, kindly, statesman-like spirit, it might be received with gratitude by the people of Ireland."

Gratitude, as Mr. Gladstone has well said, is a plant of spontaneous growth. That it will spring up in the hearts of the Irish people is, perhaps, scarcely to be expected—certainly not to be assumed. But if, as the result of long and patient effort on the part of England to do justice to Ireland, the social life of that

unhappy country become less troubled, its material prosperity enhanced, and its moral well-being restored, then Englishmen will assuredly not complain of the sacrifices they have been asked to make to attain that end.

It has been difficult to summarize the events which have taken place during a period so crowded with incident. It is almost impossible to weigh and to discriminate the motives which have animated those who have taken a prominent part in public questions during that period. From open acts and open profession alone can we infer the motives by which they were prompted. In the light of these facts and these professions, therefore, we may summarize briefly the claims of Mr. Gladstone's Government to a favorable judgment during the past two years.

Before taking office, Mr. Gladstone had pledged himself to deal with the affairs of Ireland. His first act on coming into power was to restore to Ireland the liberties she had forfeited, and to appeal to Irishmen to justify his confidence in their capacity for constitutional government. The session of 1880 was not many weeks old before the Government had undertaken two considerable measures for the relief of Ireland, and had promised a third, far more generous and extensive in its provisions than any that had ever yet been suggested.

Such was the condition of things when it found itself confronted by an organization whose programme was as unreal* as it was dishonest, which, by means of subsidies from abroad,† kept up a cruel and demoralizing agitation at home, and which was, if not the cause, at any rate the invariable companion, of cowardly and malignant crimes. At the head of this agitation was a man who announced that the reform he sought was but the lever which would enable him "to break up and undermine the British Government"; who declared that he would not rest

* The Land League cry for the total abolition of landlords was obviously a mere catch-word. No one supposes that in a country where the supply of land is limited the relations of landlord and tenant can cease to exist. That the members of the Land League did not think so is proved by the fact that many of them were themselves in receipt of rent from under-tenants, which often largely exceeded the amount paid by them to their superior landlord.

† It is noteworthy that, though during the present year the wealth of the people, even in the distressed districts, has considerably increased, the Land League received less than one and a half per cent. of the subscriptions from Ireland itself.

satisfied till he had destroyed the last link that bound Ireland to England; and who further declared that he only wanted the opportunity to effect his purpose by force of arms. He was aided, as has been said, by lieutenants who did not scruple openly to recommend to the people deliberate murder.

In the face of such a state of things no government could have refused to act; few would so long have refrained from action. To no administration could the passing of a coercion bill have been more distasteful. That it was passed was in itself an evidence of the gravity of the situation.

The first duties of a government performed, Parliament returned with pleasure and alacrity to the work which it had been unhappily compelled for a moment to lay aside.

What may be the result of that work, time alone can show. If it fails, its failure will not be due to any want of good-will, of sympathy, of earnest effort on the part of the English people, or on the part of those whom they have chosen to represent them.

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